

Historic Restoration of the Gallaudet Monument (1854)

American School For The Deaf

Restoration Synopsis

The Reverend Thomas H. Gallaudet helped establish an institution for the deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1816. After opening its doors for the first deaf students in 1817, and under the guidance of the Rev. Gallaudet, the institution evolved into the American School for the Deaf. The Rev. Gallaudet died in September, 1851. In tribute to his life's work the Gallaudet Monument was erected at the Hartford campus in 1854.

The monument was designed by Albert Newsam, an accomplished deaf artist based in Philadelphia and fabricated by James G. Batterson's Marble Steam Works in Hartford. The structure consisted of two lower base blocks of granite and an upper monument in marble. The marble portion consisted of a lower decorative molding base that supported a central die. The die had four, cubed end columns and four relief panels. The relief panels were designed by John Carlin, a New York deaf artist. The front relief panel depicts a seated Gallaudet teaching three children. The side panels have incised text and the back panel had a relief carving of "GALLAUDET" in manual alphabet (possibly the first in the nation depicted on a monument). A decorative cornice rested above the die block and a tapering central column rose from a small base and was capped by a decorative cornice and globe.

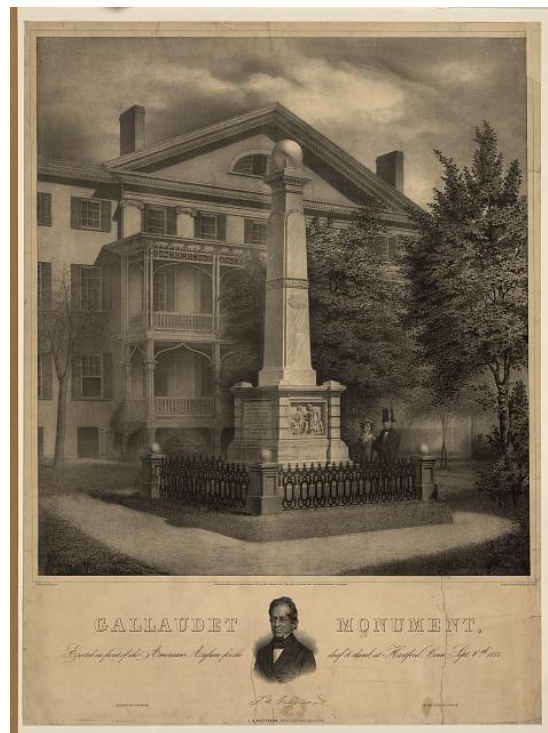
Within 20 years, the marble on the lower portion of the monument began to crack and deteriorate and by the time the school had moved to West Hartford in 1921, the stone had suffered from considerable damage. The monument was dismantled in 1919 and the units salvaged and stored at a West Hartford residence, and later, at the school. The front, marble, relief carving was retained during that period and incorporated into the 1921 entry. The sculpture is in the current ASD entry

Currently, the lower marble units have severe cracks, losses and the marble crystals themselves have lost bonding, resulting in soft, friable stone and erosion. Freeze-thaw cycles have exacerbated the issues. Fortunately, the upper marble column and capping globe, as well as the side, carved, text panels have retained stone integrity, with only relatively minor cracks and losses. The front relief carving is currently on display at the entry to the school. A fragment of the back relief carving has been saved and in the archives of the Cogswell Heritage House, ASD.



The historic, marble elements still intact will be conserved by cleaning, stain removal, stone consolidation, crack injections, fills, and patching losses. A mold will be made of the front relief sculpture to cast an exact copy of the original in bronze. Based on the existing fragment, a full model of the back relief sculpture will be made using artists from the deaf community and also cast in bronze.

With historic samples of the lower base elements and the aid of historic photographs, new granite units will be fabricated, matching the design of the original. The restored and preserved elements will be united on a new foundation with structural pinning to meet current code. The monument will stand within a new landscape design at the front of the school.



Lithograph of Gallaudet Monument by Albert Newsam, 1855. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pqa.02292>

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